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With Romney in lead, Republicans blitz Iowa

DES MOINES (AFP) - Republican hopefuls blitzed Iowa yesterday on the eve of the first contest in the 2012 White House race, with frontrunner Mitt Romney ripping President Barack Obama's handling of the US economy and world affairs.

"This president has failed the American economy, and the American people," the former Massachusetts governor and millionaire venture capitalist told cheering supporters in Dubuque, Iowa.

He blasted Obama for negotiating "zero" new trade deals since taking office and vowed to "crack down" on China over policies seen by many US voters as unfair competition that hurts the job-hungry US economy.

Romney, 64, has taken a thin lead in polls ahead of today's Iowa caucuses over veteran Representative Ron Paul, while former senator and ardent social conservative Rick Santorum has surged to third place.

"This is what the vote is about tomorrow: Are we sick and tired of the expansion of government?" Paul told a rowdy crowd packed into a hotel ballroom in Iowa's capital Des Moines, slamming his rivals as agents of the "status quo."

About 120,000 Iowans will gather today in hundreds of precincts across the state, meeting in school cafeterias, church buildings and other spots to vote after hearing speeches from their neighbors on behalf of the candidates.

Beginning the New Year with a bang!



An ages old tradition on Aruba, as with the Chinese New Year, is chasing away the bad vibes with the stupendous noise of firecrackers, while allowing the smoke produced to waft through every corner of your home and business to get rid of the fuku, (seriously, no pun intended) PRONOUNCED FOO-KOO!

Continued on page 5



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DPL introduces new policies for social welfare assistance program

ORANJESTAD -- As of January 1st, 2012 the Department for Labor Progress (DPL) introduced several new policies for the sections falling under their jurisdiction. DPL is now also involved in the process of providing advice to the Department of Social Affairs as this relates to the social welfare assistance program (bijstand).

The intention of the government is to try and minimize the amount of persons needing this assistance while increasing the amount of persons coming off of welfare and going to work.

The process of providing advice for the welfare petitions was something that the Department of Labor did in the past at DAO and now it continues at the new DPL.

The main difference of the new policy is that a positive advice is tied to certain requirements that the welfare recipient must comply with in order to obtain the assistance from the Department of social affairs. The new policy also entails that each welfare recipient will be motivated to acquire new skills through special courses to be offered by the Education for Employment (EPE) program. The ultimate goal here is so that they can become employable.

One of the primary requirements to qualify for the wel-

fare assistance is that the recipient must remain always available to the DPL, and must complete successfully at least one course offered by EPE during the 6 months of the positive advice received for the welfare assistance. The recipient must also have personally applied for a job at least once a week to the published vacancies. And, they must be willing to respond to instructions from DPL to apply at certain job vacancies known to DPL.

In the event the person does not comply with these requirements, he will forfeit his welfare assistance. He would have to reapply and comply in order to receive a positive response. DPL will also clean up their database and eliminate persons on welfare who are registered as job seekers. These persons will have to comply with the new requirements and go through the application process in order to renew their welfare assistance.

DPL intends to work much more efficiently and better structured in this area. These announced changes will enable them to expand the labor opportunities for those seeking employment. And, at the same time, they are determined to stimulate the unemployed to increase their skills and knowledge so as to make them more employable.

Policy on foreign work permits will be very stringent henceforth

ORANJESTAD -- The Department for Labor Progress (DPL) has instituted new policies with respect to the issuing of work permits for employment in Aruba.

After an in-depth analysis of the labor market, the government has instituted several positive changes to benefit the local job market. The changes entail that there is now better control between the demand and the actual labor market needs and at the same time better protection of our local market.

The DPL will conduct rigid controls in each and every case where a petition is submitted either for an extension or for a new application of a work permit. The subtle games of the past are now history and can no longer be played. The control will also cover the exact needs of the labor market so as to avoid importing foreigners to Aruba unnecessarily for jobs our own local people can fill.

DPL will focus particularly on the situations where conscientiously certain em-

ployers refuse to hire local people, or hire them and then later on fire them during their trial period under the pretext that they are incapable. DPL will work with employers to ensure that they make every effort to hire our own local people first and foremost.

Obviously, DPL will make exceptions for specific expertise and experience that may be missing on the local market. In these cases there are specific requirements that an employer must meet in order to apply and receive a work permit for a foreign worker.

These exceptions apply for example to certain specializations needed for Valero Refinery or in Education that may not be available in Aruba.

There are also exceptions for investors who have a large business company which produces revenue in the excess of 10 million dollars per year, or those with 40% of the capital for a business established on Aruba with a value of over Fls.50.000 and who cannot obtain a permit as director of the company.

For "counterpart" functions, the government will allow for permits for a period of 12 months with the possibility for a final 12 month extension. "Counterpart" situations are for companies where the requirement to have a local person in the function is mandated and said person will need the necessary training and guidance in order to assume the full responsibility after the training period has ended.

As of January 1st, 2012 the situation where one employer makes use of different consultants, is longer possible. Every employer will be permitted to have only one person, one person authorized to represent the company and submit or retrieve documents at DPL.

DPL has published all the changes and new rules regarding the different processes in their management in the local press and on their new website, as well as in the official website of the government of Aruba: www.dpl.aw, www.gobierno.aw

New Manpower planning measures at the DPL

ORANJESTAD-- The Department for Labor Progress (DPL) uses the Manpower planning registration forms for the annual labor projections between demand and job availability. This information is crucial so that they can begin working with schools and other institutions and employers on the local labor necessities.

DPL submits the manpower yers, and institutions on the island and expects them to return this form completely filled in. They are now appealing to everyone who has received this form to please return them

filled in as accurately and as completely as possible. They are reminded that there will always be the opportunity to make adjustments as needed. Adjustments will be in order for projects that may require more personnel than was first envisioned. Adjustments or adaptations will be carefully scrutinized by DPL to ensure that everything is in conformity with their regulations and standards.

For those using a consultant or company representative, please be reminded that henceforth all adaptations or adjustments must be made in person

by the employer him/herself at DPL's Offices.

Manpower planning forms for 2012 can be picked up at the Front desk of DPL situated at Seroe Blanco #4 during office hours. These forms can be submitted anytime up to March 2012. Upon submission of the forms each employer will receive a "proof of submission" statement. In 10 working days the forms will have been processed and returned to the employer.

Forms can be downloaded off the DPL website: www.dpl.aw as an added service to all DPL clients.



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The Sackx family really ♥ Aruba's new logo landmark!



Island visitors love Aruba's new logo landmark

One thing truly great about the holidays is bringing together families who often live far apart; Aruba's was filled with such reunions over the last week of 2011, but the Sackx family most likely hold the record for going the distance!

Filip and Patsy Sackx are a brother and sister originally from Belgium. He now resides with his family in California, and Patsy is thousands of miles away in New Zealand. However, Filip is a fan of Aruba and has been vacationing on the island regularly for the past six years, and what better way

to greet 2012, than to have his beloved sister join him?

Patsy traveled 27 hours to share the welcoming of a new year with her brother and his family, and to their delight, they found this kitschy but fun new addition to the Palm Beach landscape, which they considered absolutely perfect for a photographic memento of their stay. It was unveiled by Aruba's Prime Minister Mike Eman the Thursday before New Year's Eve, marking the soft opening of the new Underground Store, Aruba's unique center for retro fashion. The

new logo landmark will reside in Underground's parking lot for a time, and then will make appearances at various points on the island, offering differing backdrops for picture-snapping visitors.

Joining them for this fun shot was the family of Hyatt's Assistant Front Office Manager Deborah Wolff, who also traveled from California to share the holidays with their sister; they think the new logo is just great and sums up their feelings about Aruba perfectly!

By Rosalie Klein



Sackx Family, Patsy and Filip to the right




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Braithwaite Family and Friends invade Aruba!

A sea of brilliant blue tee shirts emblazoned with the information that the Braithwaite Family and Friends now occupied Aruba was seen all over the island on Friday, December 30. The occasion was the return of Angelica Palmida Wilson-Braithwaite to the land of her birth after departing 46 years ago as a teenager.

A warm welcome awaited Angelica at the home of her cousin, Esther, where her mother's sister, Aunt Dorothy Williams-Cannegieter greeting her and sister Altie with a huge hug. Angelica married Reggie some years ago, and her sister Altie married his brother, so they both carry the Braithwaite name.

The sisters and their children and grandchildren, with an extended family of their colleagues and friends arrived on the Royal Caribbean Adventure of the Seas as Angelica arranged this holiday jaunt to celebrate her retirement as a Staff Nurse Practitioner from the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit from The Brooklyn Hospital Center after 37 ½ years; the backs of the tee shirts sported her new slogan "No more tension-just a pension."

Continued on page 5



Braithwaite Family and Friends Reunion on Aruba



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Beginning the New Year with a bang!

Continued from page 1



Aruba witnessed some spectacular displays this year, and THE MORNING NEWS caught them for you, just in case you missed. Ling & Sons Super Center hosted their traditional annual party for the entire community on Friday, December 30, which attracted thousands to their parking lot and climaxed in a memorable display of pyrotechnics, resulting in the amazing “flowers of fire” you see here. To truly appreciate this stunning display, we suggest you view this article online at www.themorningnewsaruba.com.

At the stroke of midnight, Oranjestad and the entire island greeted 2012 with the resounding thunder of thousands of pagaras, the long strings of firecrackers numbering from the thousands to the multi-millions, filling the town with a fog, and the sky was alight with colorful explosions courtesy of Renaissance Resorts and many of the vendors in the Seaport Market.

Aruba this year, like every year, welcomed the New Year with a bang!

by Rosalie Klein

Braithwaite Family and Friends invade Aruba!

Continued from page 4



The group was picked up at the cruise terminal by Chagogo Tours, to enjoy a complete circuit of the island before being dropped at Esther's home to enjoy a true taste of island hospitality. “I am proud to be Aruban,” expressed Angie. “When my father was laid off from LAGO Oil Company in 1963, he took all of his savings and family to the USA to give them a better life. We never regretted it. I am always proud and pleased to come back to my homeland with family and friends to celebrate this accomplishment and to show them where it all started.”

“My entire family, except for my parents, is on this journey with me and about 50 of my friends and coworkers, some of whom are also celebrating their retirement. I particularly wish to say thanks to my cousins and aunt who live in Aruba and their eagerness to make this party possible and a great success.”

by Rosalie Klein



Esther Offringa Williams welcomes her cousin Angelica

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TUESDAY AND FRIDAY: LIVE MUSIC

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

New York mosque firebombed in 'hate crime' spree

NEW YORK (AFP) - New York's mayor expressed outrage yesterday after a mosque was hit by a firebomb in an arson spree that police said they were investigating as a hate crime.

The Imam Al-Khoei Foundation building in the borough of Queens suffered damage to the front door from a Molotov cocktail thrown late Sunday, police said. Two similar attacks occurred in the same neighborhood, including one in a convenience store run by Muslims.

The foundation, which describes itself as the biggest international Shia Muslim organization, said on its website that two firebombs were "hurled at the main entrance" but that thankfully "no major damage, no injury was caused by the blast."

The statement said the foundation "reiterates its resolve to continue to serve the community and to strive to bring love where there is hatred, light where there is darkness and enlightenment where there is ignorance."

In a statement yesterday, Mayor Michael Bloomberg said the three Molotov cocktail attacks "stand in stark contrast to the New York City of today that we've built together."

"Personnel from the NYPD's Hate Crimes Unit and

the 103rd Precinct's Detective Squad are moving at full steam to investigate and also determine if there are any connections to incidents outside New York City," Bloomberg said.

Shortly before the mosque incident and in the same part of New York, a general store known here as a bodega was struck with a similar device, consisting of a still-undetermined inflammable liquid in a glass Starbucks cafe bottle, a police spokesman said.

A source close to the investigation, who asked not to be identified, said that "the employees are Muslim." The firebomb struck the counter area.

A third incident, occurring just one hour after the mosque attack, saw the same Starbucks bottle and accelerant weapon thrown at a private home used by a Hindu priest for ceremonies, police said. Nothing outside the house indicates its dual use as a temple, police said.

A fourth, more destructive attack on the same evening caused a major fire at a nearby private home, although there was no proof of links between this and the other incidents.

"There were no injuries, but there was extensive damage," a police spokesman said.

The source with the investigation said that in this case arson was suspected, but there

was no indication of the same firebombs being used. The inhabitants, who were lucky to escape unharmed, were Christian and had no connection to the mosque or to the bodega, the source said.

Bloomberg has been a staunch defender of the city's Muslim immigrant population, notably in the furor over plans to build an Islamic center and mosque two blocks from the former location of the Twin Towers, which were destroyed in the September 11, 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks.

However, Muslim community leaders say their civil rights have been marginalized since 9/11, especially as a result of intrusive police surveillance.

Scores feared dead in South Sudan tribal clashes

NAIROBI (AFP) - Thousands of villagers in South Sudan hid in the bush yesterday, waiting for UN and government troops to stop a cattle vendetta which officials feared may have left scores of people dead over the weekend.

A column of some 6,000 armed youths from the Lou Nuer tribe marched on the remote town of Pibor in troubled Jonglei state, home to the rival Murle people, who they blame for cattle raiding and have vowed to exterminate.

They burned thatched huts and looted a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders, the worst flare-up in a dispute that has left more than 1,000 dead in recent months and threatened to destabilize the world's newest country.

"The situation is tense as the Lou Nuer are still around Pibor," said Jonglei state infor-

Mubarak trial adjourned



EGYPT, Cairo : AFP photo shows Egyptian anti-Hosni Mubarak protesters holding up placards calling for his execution (L) during the trial of the ousted president outside the police academy, on the outskirts of Cairo yesterday. The fallen dictator was wheeled into court on a stretcher at his trial for the deaths of protesters during the uprising that ousted him in February. Mubarak, 83, faces execution if he is convicted of the murder charge. He suffers from a heart condition and is detained in a military hospital on Cairo's outskirts. The judge in the murder and corruption trial of Egypt's ex-president adjourned the hearing to today to hear the prosecution's arguments.

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mation minister Isaac Ajiba, adding that army reinforcements were still on their way to the remote settlement.

"They (the army) are yet to arrive but we hope to have the reinforcements there soon... We have reports of several casualties, but at present the exact numbers are not verified," Ajiba added.

Newly independent South Sudan was left in ruins by decades of war with northern Sudanese forces, who fuelled conflict by backing proxy militia forces across the south, often exacerbating historical enmities between rival groups.

A group calling itself the Nuer Youth White Army issued a statement on December 26 vowing to "wipe out the entire Murle tribe... as the only solution to guarantee long-term security of Nuer cattle."

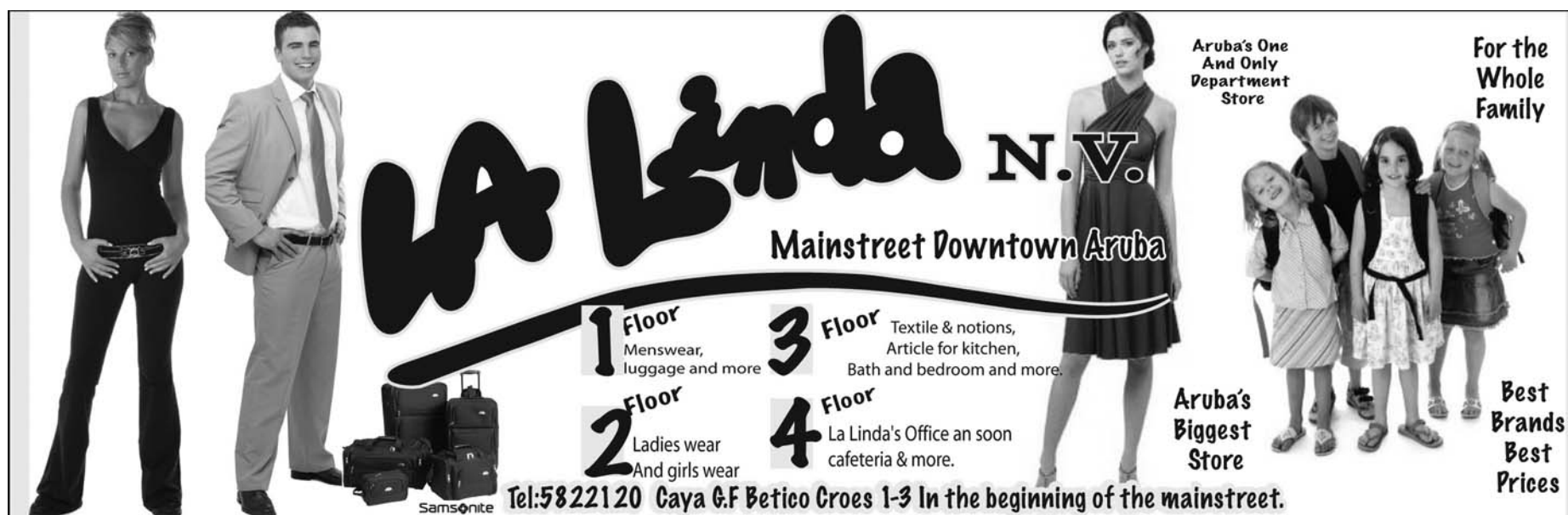
The government and the

United Nations -- which has warned the violence could lead to a "major tragedy" -- were beefing up their forces in the area.

"We are moving in a big number of forces from the army and from the police to the area," South Sudan President Salva Kiir said in a New Year's Day address.

"The senseless behaviour of raiding each other's cattle can no longer be tolerated... Any politician or community leader whose statement would be construed as encouraging ethnic hostility will be made accountable," he added.

Despite disarmament efforts, guns remain common in Jonglei, an isolated and swampy state about the size of Austria and Switzerland combined but with limited mud roads often impassable for months during heavy rains.



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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Venezuela welcomes ruling in Exxon-Mobil dispute

CARACAS (AFP) - Venezuela said yesterday an international arbitration panel had ordered it to pay \$907 million to US oil giant ExxonMobil for nationalizing its assets, but that it would pay just \$255 million after deducting certain charges.

The award amount by the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce panel was far below the \$12 billion sought by the oil titan for nationalization of key oil fields in the Orinoco basin that included two ExxonMobil operations.

A statement by the state-owned oil firm Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) said the government would pay \$255 million to the US firm within

60 days to settle the dispute.

The statement hailed what it called a "successful defense" against the ExxonMobil claims and said the US giant had been seeking an "exorbitant" sum for compensation.

It noted that ExxonMobil was pressing arbitration before a World Bank panel and said Venezuela "will take all necessary steps to defend itself" in the company pursues the case.

It said ExxonMobil's claims were "completely exaggerated and defied logic."

From the \$907 million, Venezuela plans to deduct a number of charges including \$191 million for the impact of ExxonMobil's withdrawal on

the state's bonds, \$300 million for the freezing of PDVSA assets in the United States and \$160 million in counter-claims by Venezuela.

The biggest US oil firm launched a series of legal challenges after the leftist government of President Hugo Chavez moved to nationalize foreign oil firms' assets.

In June 2006, Venezuela passed a law forcing foreign oil companies to give PDVSA at least a 60 percent share in their operations at oil fields in the Orinoco basin.

Some companies accepted compensation for the move, but ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips disputed it.

Mexican drug cartel expands into Guatemala

Mexico's powerful Sinaloa drug cartel appears to be extending its massive production of methamphetamine into neighbouring Guatemala, as hundreds of tons of precursor chemicals stream into the Central American nation.

While Mexico is usually estimated to be the main supplier of meth used in the United States, seizure data suggest that neighbouring Guatemala could in fact be producing as much or more.

That data, along with interviews with US and Guatemalan officials, also indicate that Sinaloa cartel chief Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman is taking advantage of Guatemala's remote, isolated mountains and an alliance with a key Guatemalan trafficker to make the Central American nation a new international meth pro-

duction base.

Mexican authorities seized 675 tons of a key precursor chemical in December alone, and all of it was heading for Guatemala. Officials in Guatemala, meanwhile, have seized 7,847 barrels of precursors in 2011, equivalent to about 1,600 tons and far more than Mexico's total seizures of 1,200 tons in the same year.

The Guatemala-bound chemical seized in Mexico, methylamine, can yield its weight in uncut meth, according to Steve Preisler, an industrial chemist called the father of modern meth-making.

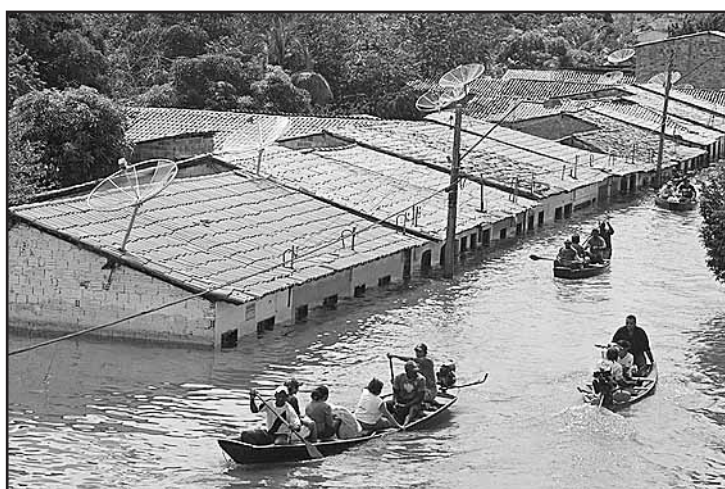
That means the total amount seized in or heading to Guatemala could theoretically produce more than a billion one-gram doses of pure meth, and billions more if cut to street-level purity.

Death toll mounts in Brazil floods

RIO DE JANEIRO (AFP) - Two more people died and one was missing yesterday following flooding in the southeastern Brazilian state of Minas Gerais that brought the total death toll to four, civil defense officials said.

A 38-year-old man died in the state capital, Belo Horizonte, when his two-story house collapsed in the flooding while his wife was rescued from the rubble, they said.

Also found dead in the courtyard of her house in the



town of Visconde do Rio Branco was a 78-year-old woman.

A third person, a 74-year-old woman, was meanwhile reported missing in Santo Antonio do Rio Abaixo.

Officials say 32 people have been injured over the past few days and 9,365 had to flee their homes while 46 municipalities have been declared to be in a state of emergency.

Two adults, a man and a woman, were killed in the floods last Tuesday.

The heavy rain has affected some two million people living in the area, officials said.

Meanwhile in Rio de Janeiro state, a state of maximum alert remained in effect in flood-hit Nova Friburgo and other localities, but authorities reported no casualties.

Once an armed rebel, Bogota mayor bans guns

BOGOTA (AFP) - The new mayor of Bogota, formerly a gun-toting leftist rebel, underscored his break with the past by announcing a ban on carrying firearms in the violence-ridden Colombian capital.

"As mayor and police chief, in accordance with the constitution, carrying weapons will be prohibited 24 hours a day in Bogota," Mayor Gustavo Petro proclaimed Sunday at a ceremony marking the start of his four-year term.

"Bogota told the world it is

a weapons-free zone and so, we will not wear them," he declared.

"It is one thing to own a weapon and another to carry one on the street, in the nightclubs, on the bus and in the parks," he told a crowd of some 4,000 people at a ceremony in Bogota's Bolivar Square.

Petro, a former senator and onetime leftist guerrilla with the M-19 guerrilla group, was voted into office in October.

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Health & Living

French breast implant firm used fuel additive



MARSEILLE (AFP) - French breast implant manufacturer PIP used a fuel additive in its now-banned implants which the company knew were defective as early as 2005, it was revealed on Monday.

The growing litany of accusations against now-defunct Poly Implant Prothese has triggered a worldwide scare with several countries, including France, advising thousands of women to have the implants removed.

France's RTL radio said it obtained an exact breakdown of the materials used in the faulty implants, including Baysilone, Silopren and Rhodorsil, all of which are industrial products never tested or approved for clinical use.

The products, used in the oil or rubber industries, allegedly contributed to the silicone gel implants having a high rupture rate.

French authorities including health safety agency AFSSAPS already knew that the

implants contained industrial rather than medical quality silicone, but this is the first time the use of petroleum industry additives has been reported.

"According to the AFSSAPS, it was known that this was an unsuitable gel, usually used in food manufacturing or for computers," a doctor advising implant wearers, Dominique-Michel Courtois, told AFP.

But "there was no way of knowing that the gel contained an additive for fuel. That's why we want implants removed from patients to be analysed themselves," added a lawyer for implant wearers, Philippe Courtois.

AFSSAPS previously carried out tests on implants seized at PIP's factory in the south of France in March 2010.

A lawyer for PIP's 72-year-old founder Jean-Claude Mas sought to play down the importance of the use of oil and rubber additives.

"These are food products, used to make beauty products, bought from (chemical giant) Rhone-Poulenc and its competitors," Yves Haddad told AFP.

Implant wearers' lawyer Courtois called for tests to be carried out on implants sold abroad, after British media revealed that rupture rates on the PIP products were seven times higher than previously thought.

"The mix (of ingredients) could vary depending on the deliveries," he said.

It also emerged on Monday that workers at PIP's sales department sent each other emails indicating they knew there was a problem with the implants' shells as early as 2005.

"Another one! Another breakage of the shell from a 2003 implant... Still no explanation?" read one of the emails obtained by AFP.

"How can it be that on opening a box the surgeon finds a hole (in the implant), and therefore a gel leak?", "If a shell problem were to erupt, you can imagine what would happen," implant salespeople wrote.

"Sales are more important than what the shells are made of," replied a PIP marketing boss.

Based in the south of France, PIP was shut down and its products banned in 2010 after it was revealed to have been using industrial-grade silicone gel that caused abnormally high rupture rates.

It is alleged that the company improvised its own ingredients when it faced financial difficulties.

Between 300,000 and 400,000 women in 65 countries from Europe to Latin America have implants made with the sub-standard gel.

France last month advised 30,000 women to have their PIP implants removed because of an increased risk of rupture, although officials have said there is no proven cancer risk.

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Tortured Afghan teen to go to India for treatment

KABUL (AFP) - An Afghan child bride who says she was tortured by her mother-in-law and locked in a toilet for six months will be sent to India for medical treatment, the government in Kabul said on Monday.

Sahar Gul, 15, was beaten, had her fingernails pulled out and was burned with cigarettes after she defied her in-laws who tried to force her into prostitution. She was left barely able to speak after her ordeal.

The girl, who was found in the basement of her husband's house in the northeastern Baghlan province late last month, had been sold by her brother to her husband about seven months ago for \$5,000.

Her family, from the neighbouring province of Badakhshan, had reported her disappearance to the police after being denied access to the home.

Interior ministry spokesman Sediq Sediqui said: "The government is sending her to India for further treatment. She will be treated for her wounds."

"Her mother-in-law and sister-in-law have been arrested, the police are after her husband and father-in-law who are at large, they will be arrested soon."



rested soon."

Women continue to suffer in Afghanistan despite billions of dollars of international aid which has poured into the country during the decade-long war.

"The president, in raising this issue to the national security council meeting, assigned the deputy interior minister to arrest the culprits as soon as possible and bring them to justice", said in a statement the interior ministry.

The teenager had previously told Afghan health minister Dr Suraya Dalil from a hospital bed in Kabul: "For several months I was locked up in toilet by my in-laws and particularly my mother-in-law."

"I was denied food and water. I was tortured and beaten," the girl also reported.

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New fire outbreak kills one in Chile



Firemen fight a massive forest fire at the Torres del Paine National Park in southern Chile on January 1.

SANTIAGO (AFP) - A new forest fire has claimed one life in southern Chile just hours after firefighters tamed a massive blaze that consumed 13,000 hectares (32,000 acres) in Patagonia, officials said Monday.

The new inferno already has consumed some 8,000 hectares in the commune of Quillon in southern Chile's Biobio region, some 500 kilometers (310 miles) south of Santiago, according to federal disaster officials.

There were at least five active forest fires blazing in Biobio that have destroyed at least 30 homes, officials said.

Late Sunday, President Sebastian Pinera announced that several hundred firefighters had succeeded in extinguishing a five-day old inferno in southern Chile's Torres del Paine National Park, a 2,400-square-kilometer (927-square-mile) nature preserve in the

Patagonian steppes.

The national park is located about 3,000 kilometers south of Santiago.

Police have accused Israeli citizen Rotem Singer, 23, of causing the fire by negligently trying to extinguish a burning roll of toilet paper, although he denies the charges.

The young man was arrested Saturday and released hours later on a condition that he not leave the region. He faces a possible sentence of 40 to 60 days in jail and a fine of about \$300.

Pinera described the penalties as too low and announced a "profound modification" in Chile's forest protection laws. He proposes increasing penalties for anyone who causes forest fires either intentionally or negligently.

In the past few days, as many as 15 forest fires of various degrees of severity have raged throughout Chile.

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Sci-Tech

BlackBerry's annus horribilis in Indonesia

JAKARTA - (AFP) Few companies better understand the difficulties of doing business in Indonesia than BlackBerry maker Research In Motion.

The government has had the Canada-based company jumping through hoops for most of the past year, repeatedly threatening to shut down its services unless it met a list of demands not required of its competitors.

For RIM, trouble in Indonesia is particularly painful as the country is the world's fastest-growing major BlackBerry market, according to industry statistics.

Subscriptions are expected to almost double from five million to 9.7 million by 2015, RIM says, as sales elsewhere tumble.

Demand is driven by Indonesia's burgeoning middle class, drawn to the BlackBerry for affordable access to the Internet and widely used BlackBerry Messenger texting service.

Indonesia, Southeast Asia's most-populous nation of around 240 million people, is also the region's biggest economy and is forecast to have grown 6.5 percent in 2011.

Indonesians are some of the world's most active users of social network sites. Of 41 countries surveyed, it had the highest percentage of Internet users accessing Twitter in June 2010, or more than 20 percent of its 45 million online population, online research firm comScore said.

Other major smartphone markets, such as the United States, are cooling on the BlackBerry, turning instead to Apple's iPhone and Google's Android device, pushing RIM shares down around 75 percent last year.

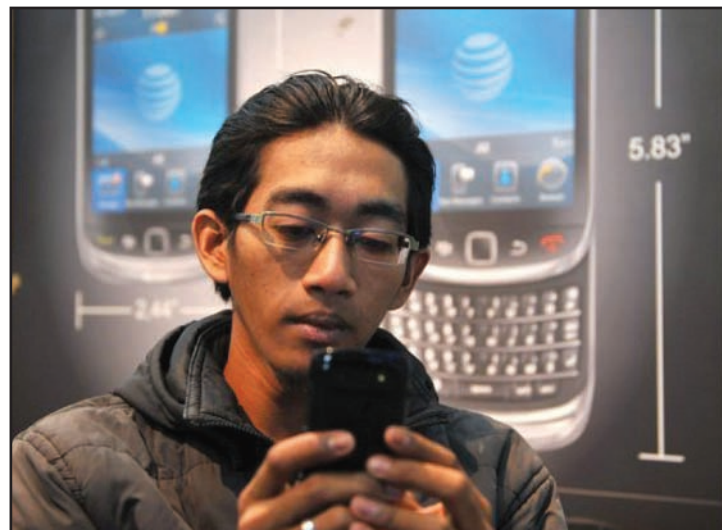
"Indonesia is a very important market for RIM," the firm's Asia-Pacific managing director Gregory Wade told AFP.

"We have millions of BlackBerry fans and subscribers throughout Indonesia. So it's our belief that no one loves Indonesia more than RIM."

But the government has so far returned little of the affection.

Instead, it has antagonised the company in a long-running row that could put off other foreign investors eyeing a largely untapped mobile phone and Internet market.

The communications and information technology min-



Few companies better understand the difficulties of doing business in Indonesia than BlackBerry maker Research In Motion.

istry has forced RIM to build dozens of customer service centres in Indonesia, block access to pornography on its devices and help law enforcement agencies intercept encrypted data shared on BlackBerrys.

In January, the ministry officially requested RIM build a network aggregator, or data centre, somewhere in the region to lower costs to Indonesian carriers that provide BlackBerry data services.

Locating the centre in Indonesia could have given the government greater access to potentially sensitive BlackBerry data, analysts said.

But RIM chose Singapore for the centre, prompting communications and information technology minister Tifatul

Sembiring to warn laws would soon be crafted to force telecoms companies to set up base in Indonesia.

Sembiring denies the new rules are aimed specifically at RIM.

"If we pass the law, RIM will have to set up the centre in Indonesia. We may excuse smaller companies, but all large telecommunication companies will have to do the same," he told AFP.

Such threats are nothing new to RIM.

When the company announced it would open a new factory in Malaysia, Indonesia's industry minister recommended parliament slap an extra tax on "such goods" as the BlackBerry "so that people would choose to invest here instead."

First Quadrantid Meteor Shower of 2012, To Dazzle Early Wednesday

The first meteor shower of 2012 — the lesser known Quadrantid meteor shower — will kick off a new year of skywatching when it peaks on Wednesday (Jan. 4).

While many meteor displays in 2011 were washed out by a bright moon, the Quadrantid meteor shower is expected to put on a spectacular light show, with no pesky moonlight to interfere. The peak of the Quadrantids will occur at around 2 a.m. EST (0700 GMT) on Jan. 4.

You could be treated to meteors at a rate of 100 per hour, NASA officials said in a statement. Luckily, the waxing gibbous moon will set at around 3 a.m. local time, so as long as there are clear skies, conditions should be ripe for meteor

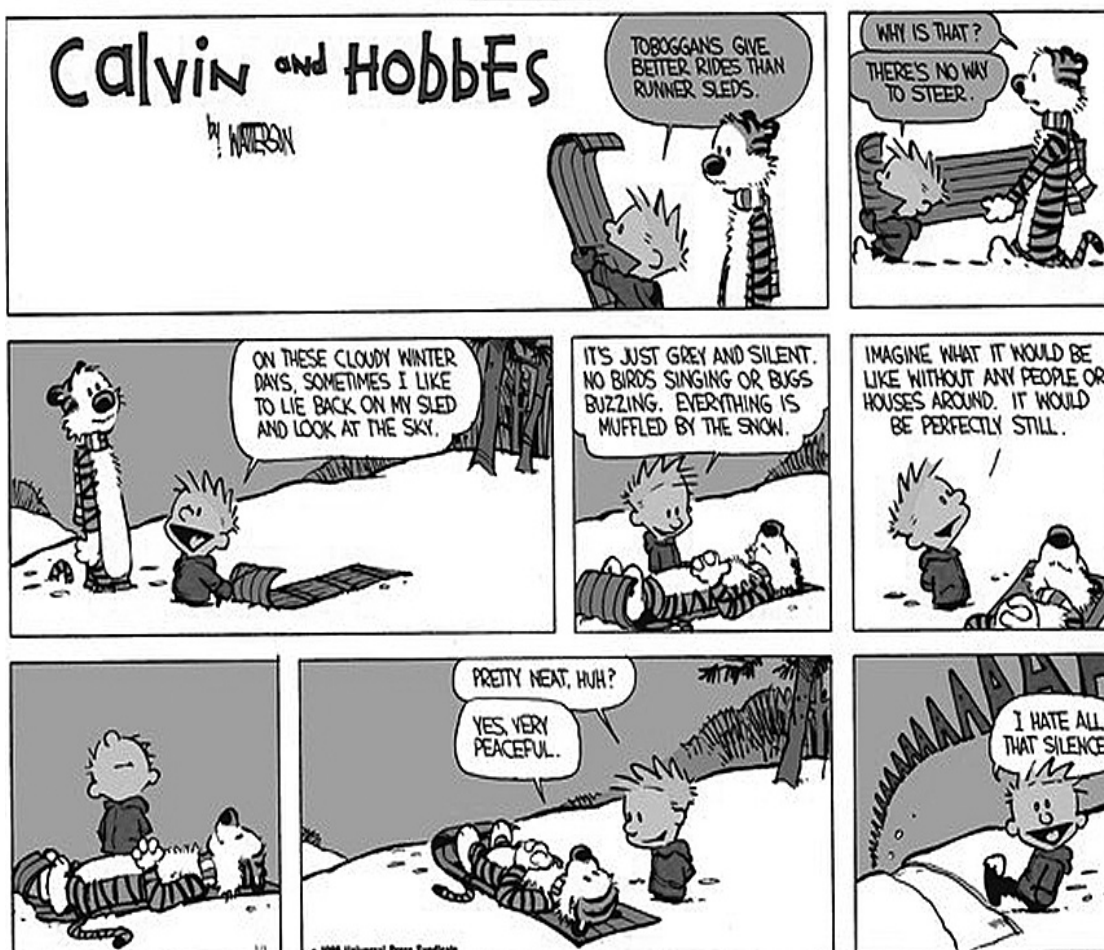
watching into the pre-dawn hours.

Unlike the more well-known Perseid and Geminid meteor showers, the Quadrantids last only a few hours, so skywatchers have a narrower window of opportunity to spot them.

Meteor showers occur when Earth travels through leftover debris from comets or asteroids. They are often known as "shooting stars," because of the way they streak across the sky.

The Quadrantids were named after the constellation of Quadrans Muralis, the wall quadrant, which is located between the constellations of Bootes and Draco. Quadrans Muralis was named by the French astronomer Jerome Lalande in 1795.

COMICS



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BETTER TOGETHER

ACROSS

1. Skidded
5. Fowles title, with "The"
10. "Get lost!"
14. Actress Olivia ("The Wonder Years")
15. Insult
16. Dip out
17. Mosque's officiating priest
18. Towel user
19. Neighborhood
20. Livelihood
23. Oater nickname
24. Bound
25. Flimflam scam
28. Kenmore purveyor
31. Opposite of: prefix
32. Height of a drama, perhaps
33. Item in a Victoria's

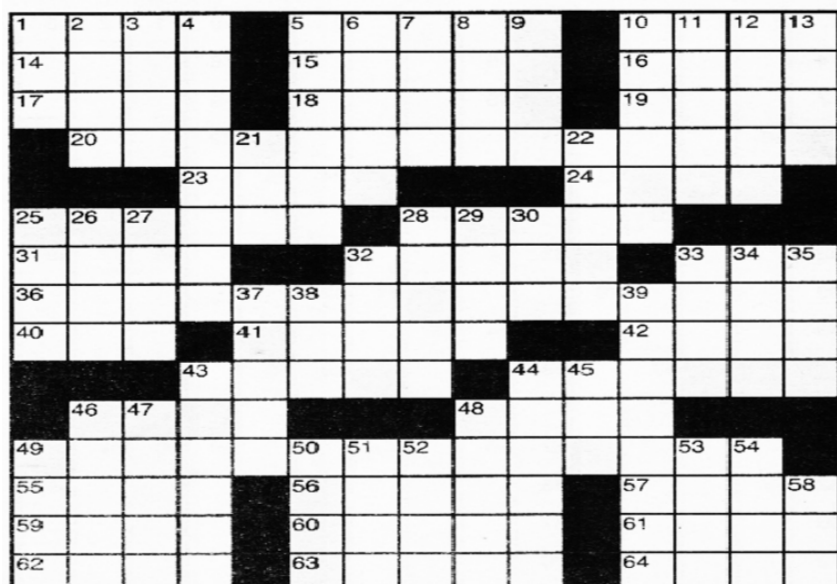
36. Complexion description
40. Fast jet, years ago
41. One daughter of King Juan Carlos
42. Ending for major or kitchen
43. 1987 Peace Nobel
44. McDonald's are golden
46. French city
48. Woodwind: abbr.
49. British refreshments
55. Labor Day mo.
56. Poplar
57. Sounds of sudden insight
59. French female friend
60. Moorage
61. Pinball

62. Rip apart
63. Empty one's wallet
64. He is, in Mexico

DOWN

1. Pentagon prog.
2. Old-fashioned endearment
3. Certain beam
4. Not imported
5. Cybill, on "Moonlighting"
6. Biblical patriarch
7. Advance
8. Employed
9. Belgrade resident
10. Puts on the schedule
11. Part of a Peruvian postman's load
12. "... but

- dazzling darkness" (Vaughan)
13. Sign of sorrow
21. More than most
22. Actress Lenore
25. U.S. general Arnold et al.
26. Ones: Fr.
27. Baseball card datum, for short
28. Waves a wand at
29. Volcano mentioned in the "Aeneid"
30. Relief
32. Addled
33. One of the "Little Women"
34. Hourly charge
35. Nurse Cherry of fiction
37. Bittern or boatbill
38. New Haven collegian
39. Construct again
43. Having wings
44. Joy (candy bar)
45. Lil' Kim's genre
46. "Want to — Grow" (Jimmy Dale Gilmore song)
47. Short putt
48. Curry powder ingredient
49. Ivan or Peter, e.g.
50. Small amounts
51. Thank the cast
52. Knock down, in London
53. The thing here
54. Hyper-tensive's no-no
58. RR depot



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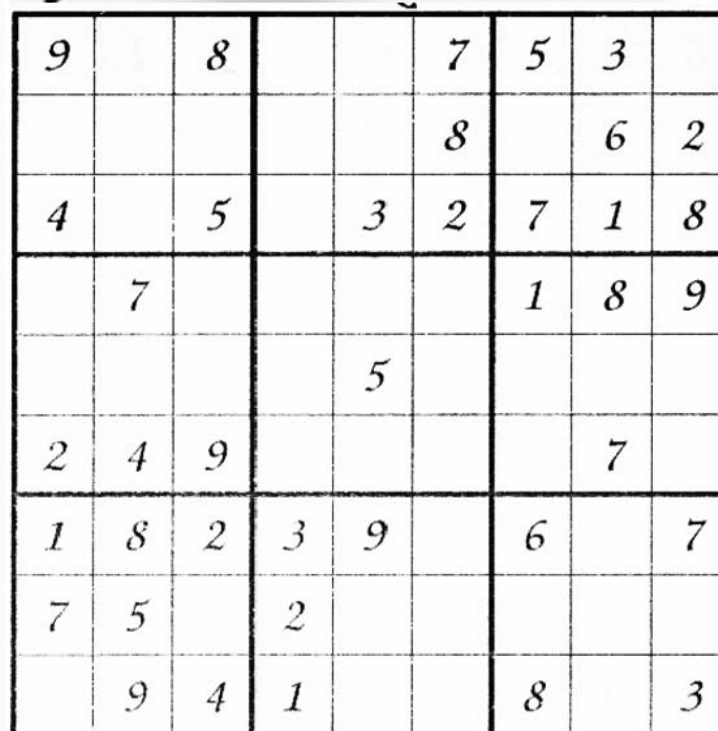
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Sudoku



SOLUTION

1	6	7	9	8	2	5	3	4
2	5	9	4	6	1	7	8	3
3	7	1	9	8	6	2	5	4
4	8	2	6	5	1	3	7	9
5	3	4	1	7	9	8	6	2
6	2	5	3	4	8	9	7	1
7	9	6	8	7	5	1	3	2
8	1	3	2	7	9	4	6	5
9	4	5	1	9	8	2	6	7

Complete the grid so that every row and every column contains the numbers 1 through 9. A number is Never repeated in a row or column. In addition every rectangle must contain the numbers 1 through 9

Finance

Spain 2011 finances could be worse than feared

MADRID (AFP) - Spain's already strained public finances could turn out to have been in even worse shape than expected last year, the government warned yesterday, setting the tone for a difficult 2012.

On Friday, the new right-leaning government said the public deficit would easily exceed the 2011 forecast of 6.0 percent of GDP as it unveiled spending cuts and tax hikes totalling 15.1 billion euros (\$19.6 billion) for this year.

Yesterday, Finance Minister Luis de Guindos said the true position could be even worse, blaming the country's wayward provinces for the problem.

"It is possible that it exceeds 8.0 percent (of Gross Domestic Product) but I hope it won't be much higher," de Guindos said.

"A big part of this difference in the forecasts comes from the regions," de Guindos said, adding that he expected them to "make an effort" to help restore fiscal health.

Spain's 17 autonomous regions, which are responsible for health and education services, were hard hit by a 2008 crash in the housing market and are a growing source of concern for economists and policy-makers as Madrid tries to stabilise the country's finances.

"Everyone must participate in this effort," the minister said. "We are in a very difficult situation, very complex, and without a doubt the hardest in the past decades in Spain."

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, freshly installed after beating the Socialists in November elections, has vowed

to meet the 2012 target of reducing the public deficit to 4.4 percent of GDP.

Madrid aims to narrow the deficit to 3.0 percent -- the EU limit -- by 2013 through a combination of spending cuts and tax hikes to better balance the government's books.

The public budget in EU terms comprises the budgets of central government, welfare systems and local authorities.

De Guindos said measures to rein in the deficit would be accompanied by structural reforms in the labour market

of budget adjustments. It is economic reforms that will allow us to emerge from the crisis."

A full budget plan is to be unveiled in March when the exact 2011 public deficit is known, the government has said.

As a gesture to Spain's near five million unemployed, the government last week extended a 400-euro-a-month payment for people whose jobless benefits have run out. The payments had been due to expire in February.

Despite the blunt warning



AFP photo shows two women collecting food waste at the main food market on December 28, 2011 in Madrid. The poor scavenge for discarded fruit and food, hunting among the delivery trucks at the Mercamadrid. Their plight is bleak evidence of Spain's stalled economy, and a queue of five million jobless people.

and the financial system aimed at reviving Spain's economy.

"The government has a very aggressive reformist agenda for the next few weeks and months," he said.

"We all must reduce the public deficit but I also believe that we must put in place economic reforms because Europe can't limit itself to a simple economic policy

yesterday by the finance minister, the stock market put on a solid 1.84 percent, boosted like other bourses by strong economic data in Germany, the EU's top economy.

Returns of online holiday gifts to hit record

After the holiday party comes the hangover for retailers: handling millions of returns this week.

With a Christmas season that has seen record e-commerce sales coming to a close, returns hit an all-time high on yesterday for United Parcel Service.

The delivery company handled more than 550,000 returns yesterday, a record, and up almost 8 percent from a year earlier. Several other days during the first week of 2012 will also top half a million returns, UPS said.

"This will definitely be the busiest year for returns," said Ken Burkeen, marketing director of the retail and consumer products division at



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Central Bank: Hungary debt hits 16-yr high

BUDAPEST (AFP) - Struggling Hungary, looking for EU and IMF help, has seen its total public debt hit its highest level since 1995 due to the sharp fall of the forint against the euro, official data showed yesterday.

According to the central bank, Hungary's accumulated public debt stood at 82.6 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), or 22.9 trillion forints (72 billion euros, \$94 billion) at the end of September, up 76.7 percent at end-June.

Half of the public debt is in foreign currencies, making the problem even worse as the forint has fallen sharply -- more than 20 percent -- against the euro since October, analysts say.

Hungary's centre-right government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban has been engaged in a "war against public debt" since taking office in May 2010.

By the effective nationalisation of some 11 billion euros in assets held by Hungary's pri-

vate pension funds, the government had managed to improve the picture by end-June.

Orban has pledged to trim the debt to less than 70 percent in 2012 and to the EU ceiling of 60 percent by 2014.

Hungary was forced to seek a 15-20 billion euros credit line from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union (EU) in November after it had difficulties borrowing on the bond market and its currency fell sharply.

However, EU and IMF officials quit preliminary talks in December amid uproar over the government's proposed reforms -- since adopted in parliament -- of the central bank which critics say undercut its independence.

Hungary's Minister without Portfolio Tamas Fellegi will meet IMF head Christine Lagarde on January 11 in Washington for informal talks on the country's request for aid, his office said yesterday.

Hungary can ill-afford to anger its international partners, which bailed it out in 2008 to the tune of 20 billion euros at the height of the global financial crisis.

Hungary's debt is now ranked below investment grade at two of the three main credit rating agencies who have cited the changes made on the central bank and other government measures.

YESTERDAY'S Crossword Answer

MARSH	ABEL	DIME
EVITA	PALE	ALAD
TITAN	ONES	YOKE
DAYDREAMS	OVEN	
LIMN	OFFERS	
MENDED	ADRAG	
ASEA	EASE	IRKER
LAWYERS	ATLANTA	
TITLE	ACRO	COCK
ARENA	SEETHE	
GIBBON	NAIL	
OREO	DAYBREAKS	
BARR	OBOE	CRIED
ETRE	RENE	TONTO
LEAR	ASST	SWEAR



FRANCE, Lille : A closeup taken on December 31, 2011 in Lille, shows triple "A" letters (AAA). The top three rating agencies -- Moody's, with Standard and Poor's and Fitch -- have all warned that the crisis has put the EU ratings at risk, with France in particular seen as most likely to lose its prized triple-A level. (AFP PHOTO)



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New exposition "Fire" opens at La Cabana Beach and Racquet Club



Beautiful fire of the sunset by Charitto Chavez

December 19th, the second in a series of four original art expositions by some of Aruba's top artists opened in the lobby of the La Cabana Beach & Racquet Club. When the popular resort in the Eagle Beach area unveiled its newly reno-

curing theme of the exhibits.

For the next four months, the works of twelve artists will adorn the walls of the lobby, most based on a theme of "Fire"; all paintings are for sale. Maria Teresa Martinez, President of MANA, a non-

bana for their interest and encouragement of the arts in Aruba and their efforts to acquaint visitors with the cultural aspects of island life.

Participating artists include Maria Teresa, Charitto Chavez, Sherry Douglas, Edmond Tujeehut, Michelle Wever, Reginald "Quake" de Palm, Frank Croes, Danilo Geerman, Michiko Takatsu, Elvis Tromp, and Mo Mohamad. The resort has also agreed to purchase a



Faya Dansi by Mo Mohamad



artists Tujeehut, Geerman, Chavez, Matthew and Croes

vated lobby and mezzanine area four months ago, management also launched the exposition "Water," the first of a series inspired by the basic four elements that are the con-

profit local art foundation, is the curator of the expositions, along with being an exhibitor. She again expressed her deep gratitude to the executive management and board of La Ca-



On Fire by Edmond Tujeehut

work from each exhibit, which will remain on permanent display in their lobby; Elvis Tromp's piece from the "Water" exposition can be seen on the left hand wall just after entering the main doors. A few other works from the first exhibition are also still on display.

Frank Croes commented for the gathering at Thursday night's opening event, as a rep-

resentative of Aruba's Department of Culture, expressing the importance of sharing the island's talent and cultural sensibilities with island visitors, and the hope that more island resorts would follow the lead of La Cabana.



You Belong 2 Each Other by Michiko Takatsu

In four months, a new exhibition "Earth" will open in the La Cabana lobby, followed by the final in the elemental series, "Air."

by Rosalie Klein

Gold Coast Aruba: Great savings for large families on holiday rentals



Aruba's newest and most innovative gated community has enjoyed steady sales since breaking ground, as many are finding the secure surroundings and outstanding amenities are just what they were looking for before considering purchasing property on the island. Some owners are using the villas or town homes as vacation retreats rather than full time and are taking advantage of Gold Coast's rental services to turn their investment into ready income.

"The greater portion of home owners are using their 'home away from home' in Aruba to escape the winter months, or spend holidays with the family on the island," noted Gold Coast developer Fito Croes. To assist in the demand for more complete facilities for groups and families, famed hotelier Ed Malone has been placed in charge of the rental program.

Staying at Gold Coast is a very attractive proposition for those traveling with groups that would require multiple hotel rooms. Two and three bedroom Villas or Town Homes accommodate large numbers and offer extensive amenities along with a final cost resulting in considerable savings. The community is minutes to the best beaches and all the casino action, and offers a quiet and secluded getaway with two swimming pools and specialized services with more on the way, such as a fitness room, tennis courts and mini-mall. Ed can arrange maid service, babysitters, caterers, airline pick-up

and drop-off; they even boast a shopping service to stock your shelves before arrival.

Gold Coast accommodations are elegant and spacious, offering privacy for parents or a few couples.



Beautifully appointed kitchens and bathrooms grace each abode; barbecues and lounges are provided for friendly cookouts and truly savoring the island life. All homes come with cable TV,



high-speed fiber-optic Internet connection, individual washer/dryer, and are fully air-conditioned. Cribs, high chairs and hair dryers are available for a modest fee. Concierge services to arrange

rental cars, spa appointments, activities and restaurant reservations are all part of the package.

Check-in for your holiday escape is conducted in the comfort of your vacation home, not while waiting on line at check-in desk. In every way, Gold Coast seeks to pamper their guests while providing them with the feeling of being in a cozy community, not the normally bustling resort, particularly experienced during the major holidays. If you wish an optimal vacation experience with great savings, visit their website: www.goldcoastaruba.com to get acquainted with the community and the layout, details and availability of accommodations, or call 586-2200 to talk personally to a Gold Coast representative.

Adorable and affordable; 5 Burgers Aruba offers an island twist to the great American Burger

Expatriates residing on Aruba, Aaron and Rosie Walisever are living their dream: a home on paradise while welcoming all and sundry to their proud undertaking, 5 Burgers Aruba. Some may be quite well acquainted with a nationally known U.S. franchise bearing the name "5", and patrons can expect the same great quality between the buns, but an expanded menu and Rosie and Aaron's fanatical dedication to giving their customers what



Rosie and Aaron love their burger too



Gouda Burger 2

they really want has resulted in a unique menu.

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression," comments Aaron; and upon entering 5 Burgers Aruba in The Village Mall in Palm Beach, one is struck by utterly spotless surroundings and a smiling, friendly, attentive service crew. Of course, the main item on the menu is burgers-the way they were meant to be, thick and juicy, made fresh daily and 100% pure beef, the kind that made the hamburger a traditional American treat.

Prices vary only slightly between regular and small (basically 2 patties or 1) with specialty items such as Gouda Burger, Farmer's Burger, Man Burger (almost 12 ounces of choice beef), and a Western Burger with crispy onion rings and BBQ sauce. All of these can be personalized with an incredible array of toppings, (mushrooms, jalapeño peppers, bacon, cheese, lettuce, tomato...whatever the list goes on) at absolutely no extra cost.

5 Burger portions are ENORMOUS! Aaron suggests that even their small serving of fries, which are

made from hand-cut fresh Idaho potatoes, is enough to be shared by two. He was very amused to watch a famous French chef demonstrating the best way to make fried potatoes on a gourmet cooking show and could only comment "He stole my recipe!" Try them the English way-with vinegar, and you'll wonder how you ever ate fries without it. This same 5-star chef also swears by Gouda as the best topping for the ideal gourmet cheeseburger.

If you are a fan of crispy friend onion rings, as we are at THE MORNING NEWS, you cannot leave there without trying their secret recipe batter-dipped gourmet rings, made from fresh, not frozen onions. Unquestionably, the best we have had anywhere, and for those that like a little spice, the fried jalapeños are a real treat. Aaron and Rosie have expanded their menu to accommodate certain tastes and dietary needs; they offer a tasty grilled chicken sandwich as well.

5 Burgers Aruba is open for lunch & dinner - daily hours are Noon to 10-ish; delivery is available to both the high-rise and low-rise hotel and beach district for orders over \$50. Enjoy a great lunch without ever leaving the beach by calling 586-3904. However, we suggest you stop by and enjoy their authentic, heartfelt hospitality; it is not unusual for either owner or Manager Marc Anthony when things are not too busy, to sit and chat while sharing their knowledge of the island. Totally yummy and fun plus a great deal for a quality burger, they are definitely worth a visit

SPORTS

Tennis: Wozniacki wins despite late show



PERTH: Bethanie Mattek-Sands of the US hits a return against Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark.

PERTH (AFP) - World number one Caroline Wozniacki arrived in Australia just hours before her match but defied jet lag and fatigue to make a winning start at the mixed teams Hopman Cup on Monday.

She scored an impressive 7-6, 6-2 win over American Bethanie Mattek-Sands after flying in from Thailand, where she was playing in a charity event.

Wozniacki and unheralded team-mate Frederik Nielsen upset the pair of Mattek-Sands and Mardy Fish 7-5, 6-3 in the mixed doubles encounter, giving Denmark a 2-1 win over the United States in Group A.

Wozniacki said it was an unusual experience to play so soon after her arrival.

"It is the first time I have done that and I was bit nervous about how my body would feel," she said. "I didn't even make it back to the hotel, I went from the airport straight to the practice (court)."

"But once I was out there I didn't even think about it."

In another Group A events on Monday, World number two Petra Kvitova and Tomas Berdych won singles matches to give Czech Republic a 2-1 victory over Bulgaria.

Wimbledon champion Kvitova opened her new campaign with a straight-sets win over Tsvetana Pironkova.

Although the 46th-ranked Pironkova was highly compet-

itive, Kvitova had too much power, winning 6-4, 6-2 in 75 minutes.

Kvitova admitted there was added pressure on her heading into 2012 compared to 12 months earlier, when she was ranked 34th in the world.

"Every season is different," she said. "One year ago I was 34, now I am two at the start of

Football: Barton says ref 'conned' as QPR crash to Norwich

LONDON, January 2, 2012 (AFP) - QPR captain Joey Barton said match officials had been "conned" into sending him off as 10-man Rangers crashed to a 2-1 defeat against Norwich at Loftus Road.

Barton was given the fifth red card of his career during a stormy encounter between the two newly promoted teams, sent off for a clash with Bradley Johnson after earlier giving Rangers a 1-0 lead.

Johnson hit the turf clutching his face as he squared up to Barton, but the QPR midfielder insisted match officials had been duped into sending him off following his dismissal.

"Well feel for the officials, they've been conned. Admitted to me at HT they never saw it. I was pulled back 1st, then

the season and everyone is seeing me on the court for the first time, and it's not always easy to play on the court.

"The first match for the year is always tough, but I played well."

Kvitova, who is hot on the heels of rival Wozniacki, could secure the top world ranking within weeks.

After Kvitova's win, world number seven Berdych secured a hard-fought three-sets win over talented youngster Grigor Dimitrov in a high quality match, 6-4, 6-7 (9/11), 6-3.

Berdych had lost his only previous encounter to the gifted Dimitrov, but prevailed in what was a high-standard singles clash to start the year.

"He's going to be really dangerous this year," Berdych said. "It gives you even more confidence to have the first win of the year and even to play a really solid game like it was today, so I'm happy for that."

kicked 2nd!," Barton wrote on Twitter shortly after the final whistle.

"Linesman definitely never saw it, all he seen was Johnsons reaction. My head dosent move forward at all. Ridiculous decision seen 25 replays.

"I'd be 1st to apologise if I'd reacted. Cannot apologise as I know I've not head butted anyone. Disappointed for the lads and the fans.

Manager Neil Warnock said he believed officials had been conned by Johnson.

The defeat left QPR hovering just two points above the relegation zone in 17th place, and Warnock's side have now lost five of their last six games.

Barton's dismissal swung the game in Norwich's favour, with Anthony Pilkington leveling for the Canaries three minutes from half-time.

QPR almost went back in front in the second half only for Norwich keeper John Ruddy to pull off a superb save from Adel Taarabt's free-kick.

But Norwich manager Paul Lambert's triple substitution 24 minutes from time -- Wes Hoolahan, Steve Morison, David Fox all coming on -- was to prove decisive and seven minutes from time Morison swept in the winner.



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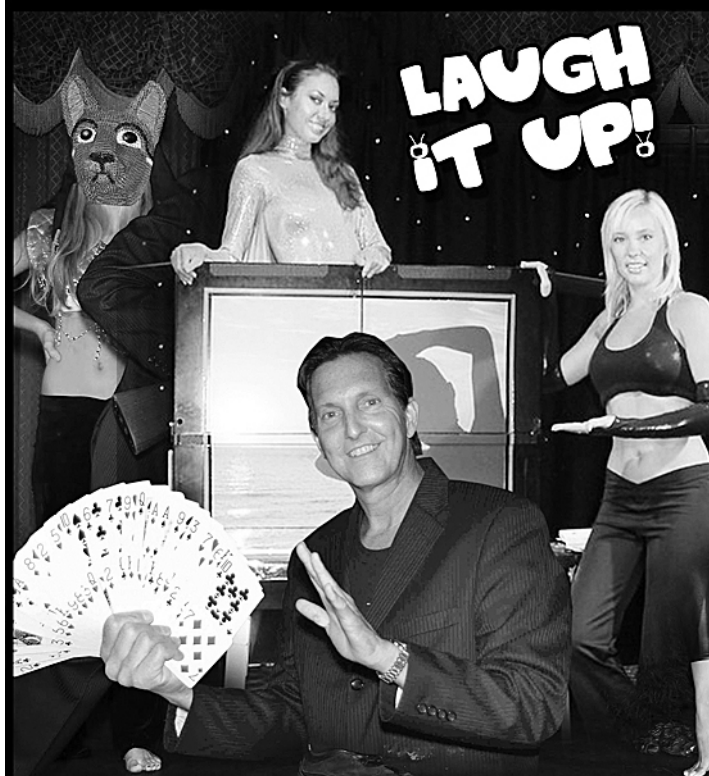
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NBA: Kings don't feel like kissing Cousins

SACRAMENTO (AFP) - DeMarcus Cousins and the NBA's Sacramento Kings appear to be breaking up as the club told Cousins to stay home rather than attend what turned out to be a victory over New Orleans.

Cousins, a center who was selected fifth overall in the 2010 NBA Draft, had asked to be traded and was not with the Kings when they defeated the Hornets 96-80 on Sunday, improving to 2-3.

"DeMarcus Cousins has demanded to be traded," Kings coach Paul Westphal said. "In the best interest of our team as we go forward, he has been directed by me, with the support of management, to stay home from the New Orleans game."

Westphal said he hopes the 21-year-old big man will rethink his position and join the Kings, with whom he averaged 13 points and 11.3 rebounds in four games.

"I hope that DeMarcus has a change of heart and joins up with full reinstatement," he said. "That's really all up to

him. This will give him the best chance to do that.

"It's something I think the team can use to band together which is the most important thing for a new team."

Cousins was suspended last February for starting a fight on an airplane with a teammate and had been fined over a dispute with a conditioning coach. Westphal indicated there was more behind-the-scenes trouble with Cousins.

"Everything that happens on a team does not become known to the public," said Westphal. "This is how it should be. However, when a player continually, aggressively, lets it be known that he is unwilling or unable to embrace traveling in the same direction as his team, it cannot be ignored indefinitely."

"As coaches, we can only ask that our players do everything they can to improve themselves as individuals and teammates."

The Kings need all the improvement they can get. They have not won more than 25 games in any of the past three seasons and have not reached the NBA playoffs since 2006.

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Tennis: Pain makes me stronger, says Federer

DOHA (AFP) - Grand Slam record-holder Roger Federer believes that his capacity for playing through pain is one of the reasons why he can challenge for the top titles again in 2012.

Speaking the day before starting the defence of his Qatar Open title, Federer cut an optimistic figure as he contemplated life on an increasingly taxing tour well into his 31st year.

"I'm happy to see I'm holding up well. You know, I definitely think that's a key to success, as much as playing well and being well prepared," Federer said.

"But also one looks at the big picture, longevity, not just thinking in the very moment."

"I was able to actually not only just maintain a good level of play but I almost increased it towards the end of the sea-

son," he added, referring to the sequence of 17 wins and three titles with which he ended last year.

Federer also made hopeful noises about being able to continue his unbeaten run, citing geography, conditions, and mindset as reasons why he can start the year well.

He felt that the distance from his last tournament, in London, was not that great, and that his confidence levels are high enough to adjust to the difference between playing indoors in Europe and outdoors here.

"It takes a little bit of adjustment, but you can definitely take confidence from the end of the year and just carry it over because you're in a good mindset," Federer said.

"I'm ready for a good season. I feel energized, ready to go. Even though the (2011)

season was long and tough, I had a nice break and great preparation, and I'm really eager for another season, so that's good."

It is two years since Federer won a Grand Slam, which is feeding his hunger. So are his memories of how close he came to glory on a couple of occasions last year.

He beat Novak Djokovic, the standout player of 2011, before playing a fine four-set final with Rafa Nadal in the French Open in Paris in June, and held match points against Djokovic in the US Open semis in New York in September.

But Federer may need to be near his best on Tuesday.

"It couldn't have been more tough," he said of a first round draw against Nikolay Davydenko, the Russian who caused a sensation by beating him and Nadal to win the title

two years ago.

"Even though I don't know the level of Nikolay at the moment, knowing the potential of him as a world class player for many years makes it difficult and dangerous," Federer added.

If Federer does win he could go on to a semi-final with Gael Monfils, the fourth seeded Frenchman whom he beat in the 2006 final here. He might then have a showdown with Nadal.

Andreas Seppi, the eighth seeded Italian, dropped only five games in beating Lukasz Kubot of Poland, while Alex Bogomolov junior, the sixth seeded Russian, came from a set and a break down to beat another Italian, Filippo Volandri, 5-7, 6-4, 6-2.

Seppi could play Federer in the quarter-finals, while Bogomolov could play Jo-Wilfried Tsonga at the same stage.



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NFL: Giants, Bengals, Broncos capture playoff spots



DENVER : Champ Bailey #24 of the Denver Broncos breaks up the catch by Jonathan Baldwin #89 of the Kansas City Chiefs at Sports Authority Field at Mile High on January 1, 2012 in Denver, Colorado.

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Eli Manning sparked the New York Giants over Dallas 31-14 on Sunday to claim a National Football League playoff berth while Denver and Cincinnati both qualified for post-season play despite defeats.

On the final day of the NFL regular season, Manning completed 24-of-33 passes for 346 yards and three touchdowns to lead the Giants to victory in a head-to-head showdown for the NFC East division title.

New England, Baltimore and San Francisco won to secure first-round playoff byes while impressive passing efforts by Green Bay's Matt Flynn and Drew Brees of New Orleans sparked flashy triumphs.

Manning connected with Victor Cruz on a 74-yard touchdown pass play in the first quarter and Ahmad Bradshaw scored on runs of five and 10 yards in the second quarter to put the Giants ahead 21-0 at half-time.

After Dallas quarterback Tony Romo threw touchdown passes of six and 34 yards to Laurent Robinson, Manning answered with an NFL one-season record 15th fourth-quarter touchdown pass, a 4-yard toss to Hakeem Nicks, to clinch a win.

"It's a great feeling, Manning said of breaking the record he had shared with his brother Peyton and NFL legend Johnny Unitas. "We needed that one to seal the victory."

Next weekend's opening-round playoff games will see the Giants host Atlanta and Detroit at New Orleans in the National Conference (NFC) with Cincinnati at Houston and Pittsburgh at Denver in the American Conference (AFC).

Top seed Green Bay and San Francisco have first-round byes in the NFC while top seed New England and Baltimore have first-round byes in the AFC.

Green Bay, Baltimore and

New Orleans all went unbeaten at home this season.

In the fight for two vacant AFC playoff spots, Denver's 7-3 loss to Kansas City on a 21-yard Dexter McCcluster touchdown run secured a wild-card berth for the Cincinnati Bengals despite their 24-16 home loss to Baltimore.

"We wanted a chance to play for the championship and we accomplished that, but we've got to keep improving," Bengals coach Marvin Lewis said.

When San Diego ripped hosts Oakland 38-26, both teams matched Denver at 8-8 atop the AFC West but Denver, mired in a three-game losing streak, won the division on the third tie-breaker, a better record against common opponents.

"Everything is mediocre. We've got to get better," Denver defensive back Champ Bailey said. "This is not the way we wanted to do it."

Oakland last reached the playoffs in 2002.

"This team needs an attitude adjustment," Raiders coach Hue Jackson said. "The killer instinct needs to exist."

Tennessee edged Houston 23-22 to match Cincinnati at 9-7 but lost out on a tie-breaker for a playoff spot. The New York Jets would have had a chance as well with a victory but lost 19-17 at Miami.

Baltimore's triumph, powered by Ray Rice touchdown runs of 70 and 51 yards, was enough to give the Ravens the AFC North title at 12-4 on a tie-breaker over Pittsburgh, who won 13-9 at Cleveland on Isaac Redman's 7-yard touchdown run.

New England's Tom Brady completed 23 of 35 passes for 338 yards and three touchdowns to lead the Patriots over Buffalo 49-21 and secure a home-field edge throughout the AFC playoffs. The Bills had led 21-0 after the first quarter.

New England's Rob Gronkowski set a single-season tight end receiving record with 1,327 yards, a 22-yard catch in the final seconds allowing him to edge Jimmy Graham of New Orleans by 17 yards for the mark.

Brees capped the NFL's greatest pass yardage season by completing 28-of-35 throws for 389 yards and five

touchdowns to spark the Saints over Carolina 45-17 for their eighth victory in a row.

Marques Colston made seven catches for 145 yards and two touchdowns for the Saints (13-3), who set NFL season records with 7,474 offensive yards, 5,347 passing yards and 416 first downs.

The Packers, who own the NFC home-field edge after an NFL-best 15-1 season, rested starting quarterback Aaron Rodgers and saw Flynn flip a 4-yard touchdown pass to Jeremichael Finley with 70 seconds remaining in a 45-41 victory over Detroit.

Flynn completed 31-of-44 passes for 480 yards and six touchdowns while Detroit's Matthew Stafford completed 36-of-59 passes for 520 yards and five touchdowns.

San Francisco clinched an NFC bye with a 34-27 victory at St. Louis while Atlanta ripped Tampa Bay 45-24 to pass Detroit for the NFC fifth seed.

Indianapolis lost 19-13 at Jacksonville to finish a league-worst 2-14 and claim the first pick in April's NFL Draft.

In games with no playoff impact, Philadelphia beat Washington 34-10, Chicago edged Minnesota 17-13 and Arizona downed Seattle 23-20 in overtime.

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